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Letter dated 5 March 1996 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I would like to bring to your attention the following.

As you are probably aware, in a recent interview to a Cypriot television channel, the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community, R. Denktash, admitted that during the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, most of the Greek or Greek Cypriot prisoners of war, who are still considered as missing, were in fact murdered by Turkish Cypriot irregulars. According to Mr. Denktash, "as the Turkish army was moving forward, it was arresting Greek Cypriots and was handing them over to Turkish Cypriot warriors. Among them were people who had lost their families or villages. And these people, instead of bringing the prisoners of war to police stations or camps, they killed them".

The issue of the Cyprus missing persons is still a matter of great concern for Greece, since it constitutes one of the most tragic humanitarian parameters of the Cyprus problem. Furthermore, the fact that out of approximately 1,500 missing persons, 73 are Greek citizens can alone explain the strong and continuous interest of the Greek Government and people on any development concerning their fate.

Consequently, you can easily understand the shock of the Greek Government and the unbearable pain among the people when Mr. Denktash cynically avowed that Turkish Cypriot "warriors" committed such incredible crimes against unarmed prisoners of war or simple civilians.

The motives of this provocative confession are for the moment not clear. One may notice, however, that the "revelations" made by Mr. Denktash coincide

with the final and critical period of the activities of the Committee on Missing Persons, which the United Nations established and you personally managed to reactivate. The Greek Government believes that the work of the Committee should not be diverted by Mr. Denktash's statement. On the contrary, the Committee should continue its work of investigation, in order to reach final and indisputable conclusions.

The issue of the missing persons cannot and will not be closed by means of provocative confessions, which, among others, attempt in vain to discharge the Turkish occupation forces of their own share of responsibility. The responsibility of Ankara is already enormous because the Turkish army, acting in flagrant violation of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, did not offer protection to its prisoners of war. On the contrary, according to Mr. Denktash, it handed them over to the "warriors" for execution.

What is of great importance to us is the fact that, even though the Turkish Cypriot leader claims to have known the truth right from the beginning, he preferred to withhold it, preying upon many families' hopes and grief. Does this prove the integrity and good faith of a negotiator who is supposed to contribute to the quest for a just and viable solution to the Cyprus issue?

The unacceptable crimes committed and avowed by the Turkish side bring the international community before its own responsibilities. We have all shown a great deal of interest and concern for similar cases in other parts of the world, and we cannot ignore the crimes against humanity committed in Cyprus. I am confident that the United Nations will take all the necessary measures in order to investigate the exact circumstances of the crimes and attribute the corresponding responsibilities, as it has done in other similar cases.

As far as the Greek Government is concerned, it reserves the right to make use of all means at its disposal aimed at denouncing in all competent forums all those involved directly or indirectly in this crime, and attributing the corresponding responsibilities arising therefrom. However, denunciation or even punishment is surely not an end in itself. As in all places around the world, the relatives of the missing Greeks and Greek Cypriots rightfully expect to be informed about the fate of their people. In case the Committee on Missing Persons, following investigation, actually confirms their deaths, they demand to get possession of the remains of their dead in order to bury them according to practices dictated by our religion and our customs. I believe this is the least the international community can do for these people, for our civilization and our conscience.

I would kindly request your assistance in circulating the present letter as an official document of the General Assembly, under items 55 and 112, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Vassilis KASKARELIS
Deputy Permanent Representative
Chargé d'affaires a.i.